



# Helping a Depressed Person

The very nature of depression – the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and worthlessness – can keep the depressed person from seeking help. When symptoms linger beyond a reasonable time, or if there seems no apparent reason for the individual's persistent feelings of unhappiness and gloom, the observant and caring friend or relative should help the depressed person get professional assistance.

Family and friends can also provide much needed support, love and encouragement. Depression destroys self-esteem and confidence, and family and friends can help the depressed person feel worthwhile.

## DO

- Maintain as normal a relationship as possible
- Point out distorted negative thinking without being critical or disapproving
- Acknowledge that the person is suffering and in pain
- Offer kind words and pay compliments
- Express affection
- Show that you care, respect and value the depressed person

## DON'T

- Blame the depressed person for his or her condition
- Criticize, pick on, "put down" or voice disapproval until the depressed person is feeling better
- Say or do anything to exacerbate his or her poor self-image

In addition, friends and family can help by keeping the depressed person busy and active. Depression tends to feed on itself, and a moderately depressed person can become apathetic and inactive. This leads to more depression, more withdrawal and more inactivity – resulting in a vicious cycle. Gentle assertiveness may be required to stand by the depressed person, particularly if the individual is withdrawn and rejecting.

Depression typically involves strong feelings of guilt, and it is important that family and friends do not compound such feelings by blaming the individual for his or her symptoms. Depressed people often arouse anger in others, and it is tempting to become impatient, to tell the depressed person to snap out of it or to indicate that depression is a sign of weakness. The depressed person is in pain and needs understanding and help.

Also, the possibility of suicide must always be considered in cases of depression. Though a depression may appear relatively mild, it does not exclude the possibility of suicide. Sometimes seemingly mild depression has much deeper roots. Nor is it true, as many people believe, that a person who talks about suicide will not attempt it. Those who attempt suicide often appeal first for help by threatening to do so.

Even when there appears little or no danger of suicide, a mental health professional should be consulted when a serious depressive disorder is suspected. The earlier the depressed person receives help, the sooner the symptoms are alleviated and the speedier the recovery.

Depression is the most treatable of all the mental illnesses. Individuals no longer have to suffer its debilitating symptoms. With modern treatment methods, they can return to full and productive lives.

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral health care advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a qualified health care professional.

